French Historical Studies

VOLUME VI ■ NUMBER 3 ■ SPRING 1970

ARTICLES

Community and Legal Change in Capetian France.
By Gavin I. Langmuir 275

Suum cuique tribuere.
By Fredric L. Cheyette 287

The Mise of Amiens and Saint-Louis' Theory of Kingship.
By Charles T. Wood 300

The Functioning of Ambassadors under Louis XIV.
By William J. Roosen 311

The Dissolution of the Maximums and Trade Controls in the Department of the Somme. By James R. Harkins 333

Marshal Davout and the Second Bourbon Restoration.
By John G. Gallaher 350

The Legend of the Vichy Synarchy.
By Richard F. Kuisel 365

NEWS 399

RECENT BOOKS ON FRENCH HISTORY 401
Compiled by John G. Gallaher

EDITORIAL BOARD

David H. Pinkney, Editor
University of Washington

Scott Lytle, Associate Editor
University of Washington

Paul H. Beik
Swarthmore College

John C. Cairns
University of Toronto

John G. Gallaher, Bibliographer
Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville

Raymond Grew
University of Michigan

Jean Joughin
American University

Orest Ranum
Johns Hopkins University

Herbert H. Rowen
Rutgers University

Alan Spitzer
University of Iowa

Arthur Wilson
Dartmouth College

Joan Manzer, Editorial Assistant

Published by the Society for French Historical Studies with the support of the University of Washington

© 1970 by the Society for French Historical Studies. Printed in the United States of America by Heffernan Press, Worcester, Massachusetts.

The Legend of the Vichy Synarchy

Richard F. Kuisel

During the Second World War a strange tale of international intrigue acquired wide credibility in France. In essence the story told of a secret society known as the Synarchy, founded by a group of cosmopolitan business magnates that had first arranged for an easy German victory over French arms in 1940, and then had surreptitiously seized control of the economy and eventually of the new government at Vichy. The members of this society were supposed to have been bound to secrecy by an oath whose violation entailed death; but one member's blunder had exposed the conspiracy and thwarted the society's scheme to manipulate the economic life of France to its private benefit.

Now removed from their wartime context, the lurid and melodramatic characteristics of this story may well arouse the suspicions of the dispassionate historian. But during the period 1941-44 the tale of the Synarchy disrupted the Vichy government and altered its policies, alarmed the German occupation authorities, and prompted the United States intelligence service to launch an investigation into its veracity. Even with the passage of time the legend has not been entirely discredited; indeed, its continuing appeal to human gullibility and its incorporation into more recent political controversies have contributed to its further amplification and distortion.[1]

My purpose here is first to establish conclusively that the notion of a conspiratorial Synarchy was indeed a fabrication, and secondly to understand why and how mere rumor achieved the status of an enduring legend; for such an understanding reveals much about politi-

Mr. Kuisel is assistant professor of history at the University of California at Berkeley.

1 The latest version exposes not only the defeatists of 1940 but also French technocrats in general, including Jean Monnet, as accomplices of the Synarchy; see André Ulmann and Henri Azeau, *Synarchie et pouvoir* (Paris, 1968). In his new, popular history, *The Collapse of the Third Republic* (New York, 1969, pp. 237-38), William L. Shirer credulously assigns the Synarchy a "considerable" rôle in undermining the Republic.

cal and economic affairs at Vichy, especially as they related to the issue of technocratic reform. The original version of the legend was the work of a paranoid imagination which wove together the histories of three disparate groups of activists, creating a conspiracy among them where none existed. These three strands were first, a clique of Vichy technocrats; secondly, the study groups founded by the businessman Jean Coutrot; and finally, an apocalyptic Masonic sect known as the Martinists. Joined together, they formed the legend of the Synarchy.

The appalling military defeat of 1940 and the sudden "suicide" of the Third Republic allowed many of those who had been left out of the republican consensus to take their revenge. Under the uncertain and often contradictory leadership of Marshal Philippe Pétain numerous shades of right-wing opinion—Maurrassian, fascist, military—won recognition denied them by the Republic. Each of these tendencies was able to exert some influence over the constantly shifting policies of the Vichy régime. Among these heterogeneous factions a group known as the Vichy technocrats tried from the very outset to make economic affairs its special preserve. "Technocrats" is an appropriate label for these relatively young reformers who hoped not only to streamline the French economy and to propagate modernizing values like efficiency and productivity but also to win political authority for apolitical experts.

For the most part the Vichy technocrats were young men—in their early forties—and, although they were already experienced in business or government administration, had had little top-level political influence under the Republic. In 1940 when Pétain launched his "National Revolution" to remake French institutions, he called these men to assist him. Overnight minor civil servants and business managers became ministers or secretaries of state or directors of important state agencies. Usually these newcomers had had no strong political affiliations. Many were graduates of the *grandes écoles,* especially the Ecole polytechnique or the Ecole libre des Sciences politiques, which trained state engineers and inspectors of finance to supervise government economic services. In general the technocrats held enlightened economic views: they accepted the necessity of an interventionist state, modern production techniques, and national planning. By temperament and training these new administrators tended to be vigorous and aggressive, eager to move ahead and to introduce reforms. They shared the elitist attitude, prevalent among those educated in the *grandes écoles,* that change must come from above rather than from

the people. In their own eyes the technocrats were hardheaded realists, convinced only by facts, and skeptical of theory, especially of political ideologies.

The average Frenchman has long nursed a strong distrust for such leaders. According to a popular analogy the technocrats are simply successors to the aristocrats, the priests, and the capitalists—in short, to previous oppressive ruling castes. The technocrat is alleged to be merely a new type of capitalist exploiter who parades as a government official or a corporation executive, but who is actually an agent of moneyed interests—the big banks and the international trusts. And contrary to his own self-conception the technocrat is considered to be "bloated with book learning" and lacking in the common sense needed for good management.[2] During the political campaign that elected the Popular Front in 1936, left-wing parties had successfully utilized this antitechnocratic sentiment in an attack against the French plutocracy, the infamous "two hundred families" and their technocratic lackeys who managed the giant corporations. It was this traditional suspicion of the technocrat who supposedly ran the economy for the benefit of the *gros* at the expense of the little man that made the experts at Vichy vulnerable to popular attack.

Of the first generation of technocrats who came to power in July 1940 there were four who figure prominently in our story: Yves Bouthillier, Jacques Barnaud, Jean Bichelonne, and René Belin. The first three were either polytechnicians or inspectors of finance, and only Bouthillier, who was minister of finance both before and after the armistice, had held high office under the Third Republic. The early arrivals like the resourceful Bouthillier helped the others win their appointments.[3] Of the newcomers Belin had the most unusual background; he was a right-wing trade union official. Yet his anti-communism and his interest in economic planning and harmonious industrial relations had won him friends in technocratic managerial circles. As Vichy's minister of industrial production and labor Belin

2 Georges Vedel, "Les Problèmes de la technocratie dans le monde moderne et le rôle des experts: rapport sur la France," paper submitted to the Fifth World Congress, International Political Science Association (Paris, 1961), pp. 2-3.

3 Philippe Bauchard, *Les Technocrates et le pouvoir* (Paris, 1966), pp. 115-16; testimony of Jacques Barnaud in Assemblée nationale, première législature, session de 1947, *Rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée d'enquêter sur les événements en France de 1933 à 1945, Annexes* (Paris, 1951), VIII, 2301 (hereafter cited as *Commission d'enquête*). Another prominent technocrat, Paul Baudouin, who was a polytechnician and a former bank director, supported Bouthillier's personnel recommendations. Baudouin was minister of foreign affairs at Vichy but resigned his post before the Synarchy affair began.

chose Barnaud and Bichelonne as his principal advisers on industry. Barnaud was the former *directeur-général* of a large commercial-industrial-financial enterprise, Worms et Cie. His affiliation with what was commonly called the "Worms bank" was to become a serious liability for the technocrats. The brilliant Bichelonne, whose influence on industrial affairs grew with time, attracted both awe and hostility.[4]

Since the head of state, Pétain, and the vice-president of the council of ministers, Pierre Laval, both lacked competence in economic affairs, they left that field open to the technocrats. Working together these men drafted the most substantial and far-reaching reform of French industrial activity ever introduced by the Vichy government: the decrees of August 16 and September 17, 1940.[5] In less than two days they improvised this legislation to meet the economic crisis brought on by the defeat. Their principal aims were to revive industrial production and to prevent the Germans from gaining control of the country's economic life. Conversion from war production, widespread unemployment, and material shortages were major obstacles to industrial recovery. But they were most concerned with the threat posed by the German military authorities, who were taking advantage of the general economic disarray to seize control of factories in the occupied zone, instigate labor unrest, and hire away workers for German plants. The technocrats' remedial legislation established Organization Committees (*Comités d'Organisation*) which, it was hoped, would protect French industry from German manipulation by bringing a quick end to the existing disorder and by placing an official government barrier between the occupation forces and French enterprises.

Each industrial sector was brought under the control of an Organization Committee staffed by employers and given wide powers of self-government under state supervision. The committees were charged

4 To one colleague Bichelonne's "personality, intelligence, and accomplishments recalled those of Napoleon"; see Hoover Institution, *France during the German Occupation, 1940-1944,* trans. Philip W. Whitcomb (Stanford, Calif., 1958), I, 43 (hereafter cited as Hoover Institution, *German Occupation).* While to a critic like Henri Du Moulin de Labarthète (*Le Temps des illusions* [Geneva, 1946], p. 327) Bichelonne may have been "one of the greatest technological minds of this century," but he had not yet reached "the age of political puberty."

5 See Belin's description of their work in Hoover Institution, *German Occupation,* I, 143-54; Bauchard, *Technocrates et le pouvoir,* pp. 118-23; Henry W. Ehrmann, *Organized Business in France* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 76-90; Yves Bouthillier, *Le Drame de Vichy,* II (Paris, 1951), 273-75, 279-80. Bouthillier had the least to do with framing this legislation, but it was widely believed that he was a coauthor. The decree of September 17 actually established a separate administrative apparatus for the allocation of raw materials, but it worked in conjunction with the Organization Committees. The best over-all study is Jean-Guy Mérigot, *Essai sur les comités d'organisation professionelle* (Paris, 1943).

with gathering data, allocating scarce raw materials, organizing production, and setting prices. As conceived by their creators the multipurpose committees also represented a first step toward overhauling the prewar economy which in their view lacked order and direction. The new administrative machinery introduced a form of national economic planning built on close collaboration between business and government and oriented toward technological progress. Since both management and labor were compulsory members of this new corporativist system, it was hoped that common occupational interests would prevail over older class conflicts and promote industrial harmony.

Meanwhile a palace revolution at Vichy interrupted the technocrats' planning. Laval, who had been the head of the government since July 1940, was dramatically dismissed from office on December 13 and placed under house arrest. He had never enjoyed Pétain's confidence, and when it seemed that he was preparing to usurp the latter's powers, a conspiracy of high-ranking government officials had him removed.[6] The plotters had little in common with one another except their hostility to Laval; among them was only one prominent technocrat, Bouthillier, who disapproved of Laval's willingness to make economic concessions to the Germans. A second conspirator, who plays an important part in our story, was Admiral François Darlan; as minister of the navy he feared for the safety of the fleet under Laval. Bouthillier and Darlan both earned Laval's animosity for their part in his fall.

But Laval was not the only victim of the December coup d'état; Marcel Déat was also arrested. Déat was a heretical Socialist who had tried to organize an independent socialist movement committed to order and authority in the 1930's. After the fall of France his paper, *L'Oeuvre,* became an organ of the Paris "ultras" who sought a "true" or fascist style National Revolution and who supported frank and close collaboration with Germany in building the new European order. His strong journalistic criticism of the ministers at Vichy, except Laval, whose policies he approved, provoked the cabal of December 13 to order his arrest. The German authorities, who naturally regarded both Laval and Déat as favorites, were enraged by the coup. They obtained Déat's release, and the German ambassador, Otto Abetz, tried to bully Pétain into reappointing Laval but to no avail. After the crisis had passed, Laval remained in exile at his country estate, where he nursed ideas of revenge on Bouthillier, Darlan and company. Déat returned

6 Geoffrey Warner, *Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France* (London, 1968), p. 259.

to his newspaper more eager than ever to hound the "criminals" of December 13 and to work for Laval's restoration.

In February 1941 Admiral Darlan finally emerged as Laval's successor. When the new vice-president announced the members of his cabinet on February 25, the technocrats held even more places than they had had under Laval. The first generation of technocrats, Bouthillier, Barnaud, Belin, and Bichelonne, either retained their posts or received new responsibilities.[7] They were joined by other economic or administrative technicians; indeed, it was then that the young experts from the *grandes écoles* came to power. The most ambitious and the most forceful of these newcomers was Pierre Pucheu, who became minister of industrial production before taking over the ministry of the interior in July. He had previously managed a large tool company belonging to the Worms syndicate. His successor as secretary of state for industrial production was François Lehideux, a skillful negotiator and the former director of the Renault automobile company. Another new colleague was Jacques Benoist-Méchin who held several high diplomatic posts under Darlan. He was a man of letters with well-known pro-German sympathies. The least important of the new arrivals was Paul Marion, an avowed fascist who served as secretary-general for information and propaganda in 1941.

One other member of Darlan's team served as a leader and an adviser without ever holding office—a kind of "Grey Eminence" to the technocrats. This was Gabriel Leroy-Ladurie, a colleague of Barnaud's at Worms et Cie., where he directed the firm's banking service.[8] Leroy-Ladurie, Pucheu, and Barnaud had all worked for the Maison Worms before the war.[9] The owner-manager of the firm, Hypolite Worms, was a baptized Jew, and although the company's commercial network was world-wide, much of its trade was with Great Britain. These Jewish and British affiliations, combined with the company's reputation, deserved or not, for financing political movement made it a prime target for the pro-Nazi press. Journalistic attacks against the "Anglo-Jewish" Worms syndicate had already begun in the fall of 1940.

A certain mutual attraction prevailed among the technicians of Darlan's entourage. Most of these newcomers were graduates of the

[7] Barnaud became a delegate in charge of economic affairs to the armistice commission, while Belin's ministry was divided and the latter became the minister of labor.

[8] For a history of Worms et Cie. see the long series of articles written between 1948 and 1950 by Roger Mennevée and published in his journal *Les Documents de l'agence indépendante d'informations internationales* (hereafter cited as Mennevée, *Documents*).

[9] The only other technocrats who had known each other prior to 1941 were Pucheu, Benoist-Méchin, and Marion, who had participated in Jacques Doriot's fascist league.

grandes écoles and, in the eyes of others, were *bien élevés*. Benoist-Méchin later said that youth was their primary affinity.[10] They also displayed a common vigor and dedication that surprised others: Pucheu was described as "looking like a man who is going to eat a lion."[11] Each member of the team seemed to have a desk full of projects, and each was anxious to use the power of his office to realize them.[12]

But most important these men shared a similar approach to France's predicament. They believed that the old European order had collapsed in 1939-40 and that France must adapt itself to Hitler's New Order. They were not fascists (except for Marion), however, as the antipathy of the Paris ultras toward them proves. Their goal was to reinvigorate France and make it a more suitable partner to Germany; thus they would make the Reich respect France's integrity. It was intolerable, for example, that a German super highway became a small country road when it reached the French border. Economic affairs were the technocrats' specialties, and they remained closely identified with the Organization Committees during 1941, when Pucheu and later Lehideux took charge of industrial production. To Darlan's technocrats collaboration with Germany was not mere submission to necessity, not just "protecting the furniture" as Benoist-Méchin put it, but a new departure for France.[13] When Darlan was accused by a member of Pétain's staff of putting the "Worm bank" in power, he supposedly answered: "That's better than the beardless altar boys who form your entourage! We don't want any generals or seminarians, but sharp young fellows who will come to terms with the Fritz and cook up a good soup for us."[14] One acute commentator later observed that the fall of Darlan's team marked "the end of an era. After them, collaboration might still derive from faith or resignation; it would never again arise out of cold political calculation."[15]

10 Jean-Louis Aujol, ed., *Le Procès Benoist-Méchin* (Paris, 1948), p. 84.

11 Maurice Martin du Gard, *La Chronique de Vichy, 1940-1944* (Paris, 1948), p. 223.

12 For example, see Lehideux's summary of the plans made by his national equipment agency in Hoover Institution, *German Occupation*, I, 36-38.

13 Aujol, *Procès Benoist-Méchin*, pp. 607-9. Otto Abetz held a similar view of these technocrats; see his *Histoire d'une politique franco-allemande, 1930-1950* (Paris, 1953), pp. 196-99. The mutual attraction between French and German technocrats brought Bichelonne and Albert Speer, Nazi minister of armaments, together in 1943 to combat the forced labor policies of Fritz Sauckel; see Alan S. Milward, "German Economic Policy toward France, 1942-1944," *Studies in International History: Essays Presented to W. Norton Medlicott*, eds. K. Bourne and D. C. Watts (Hamden, Conn., 1967), pp. 427-28.

14 Du Moulin, *Temps des illusions*, p. 326.

15 Alfred Fabre-Luce, *Journal de la France* (Paris, 1943), II, 118. Stanley Hoffmann distinguishes *collaboration d'état* from collaborationism and further subdivides these categories in "Collaborationism in France," *Journal of Modern History*, XL (Sept. 1968),

Some of these "young men in a hurry" were clannish. This was especially true of Pucheu, Barnaud, Lehideux, Benoist-Méchin, Marion, and Leroy-Ladurie, who dined together and *tutoied* one another. As inveterate Parisians they found life at Vichy provincial and every weekend found reason to drive to the old capital. The most nervous members of this team were suspicious of rival cliques and after the palace revolution of December 13 felt as if they were living in "a fifteenth-century Italian monastery where the dagger awaited them among the flowers."[16] In fact their fears were not groundless. From the day Darlan's team came to power they faced serious opposition from at least three different quarters. The Hôtel du Parc housed the head of state and his staff, among whom antitechnocratic sentiment was rife. In addition they were opposed by small-business interests; and they were under constant fire from the fascist press in Paris. Eventually the weapon used against Darlan's experts was not a dagger but a slanderous rumor.

One of their principal political rivals was Pétain's *chef de cabinet* and minister of intrigue, Henri Du Moulin de Labarthète. He had endeared himself to Pétain, but to many others he seemed flippant and irresponsible. According to Du Moulin his relations with Darlan's team were at first cordial—perhaps because he was a former inspector of finance himself—but when he took exception to the technocrats' efforts to pack the government with their friends, relations became chilly. They became openly hostile when Pucheu, in Du Moulin's eyes, began acting like a "super minister" and the "second vice-president of the council." Always alert for rivals, Du Moulin informed Pétain that Pucheu was a "megalomaniac" bent on displacing him as head of state.[17]

The simmering feud between Du Moulin and Pucheu was not the only source of friction between Darlan's economic experts and the Hôtel du Parc, where the Maurrassians ruled. Some high ranking military leaders on Pétain's staff, like Vice-Admiral Jean Fernet, as well as his personal secretary, René Gillouin, strongly disapproved of the "inspectors of finance and their acolytes," who supposedly worked for the trusts against the true aims of the National Revolution. Gillouin complained of how these experts took advantage of Pétain's "innocence" in economic affairs to hoodwink him. According to Gillouin Pétain did not even know what the term "discount" meant.

375-95. According to this classification the technocrats seemed to have practiced voluntary *collaboration d'état* while a few, like Benoist-Méchin, were collaborationists.

[16] Du Moulin, *Temps des illusions*, p. 328.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 328-29, 331-33.

This economic illiteracy supposedly gave the experts the opportunity to deceive Pétain—to agree with his policies in public but to betray him in private.[18]

It is true that Pétain had originally brought the technocrats into his government because he believed them to be more competent in reforming the economy and managing the Organization Committees than himself. But if any segment of the business community was to benefit from the reform, Pétain preferred to help the small, rather than the large, employers. He believed that big business was controlled by the trusts whose interests were more cosmopolitan than French and who could be expected to oppose any measure that threatened their domination; these interests, he contended, were wedded to the status quo and had been largely responsible for the persistent strife between management and labor. Thus on November 9, 1940, he had dissolved the largest employer and trade union federations, the bastions of old-style big business and militant syndicalism. At that time, apparently, Pétain believed that he was aiding the technocrats' and the Organization Committees by clearing the way for the new economic order. But early in 1941 the marshal himself began to express disappointment in the Organization Committees because he sensed the technocrats were too partial to the trusts. In August 1941, partly as a result of the Synarchy scandal, he was to demand an overhaul of these technocratic agencies to protect them and the National Revolution from the trusts.

Among the French public there had been open criticism of the technocrats' plans for economic reconstruction from the outset. Resentment against the Organization Committees, and by association against Darlan's team, was particularly strong among small employers.[19] Pierre Nicolle, who lobbied for small-business interests at Vichy, had arranged an interview with Pétain as soon as he heard of the proposed legislation. Nicolle had told the head of state that the proposal was "entirely *étatiste*, since it placed the committees . . . under the authority of bureaucrats and their friends."[20] When the second generation of technocrats was appointed, Nicolle commented, "The sum and substance of all the opinions expressed today is that we are witnessing the results of Bouthillier's schemes; he wanted an *étatiste* regime with an economy directed by the inspectors of finance for the benefit of the

18 René Gillouin, *J'étais l'ami du Maréchal Pétain* (Paris, 1966), pp. 34-38, 218-22.

19 Mérigot (*Essai*, pp. 465-81) explains how merchants and artisans viewed the committees as further bureaucratic interference in their private affairs, while manufacturers at first tended to look to the new organisms for help, but turned against them when they proved unable to extend state controls.

20 Pierre Nicolle, *Cinquante mois d'armistice* (Paris, 1947), I, 64.

moneyed powers. . . . These mandarins are on the verge of leading us into a new and definitive collapse!"[21] Later, when Nicolle traveled about the free zone consulting with the trade associations he represented, he reported that the Organization Committees were blamed for causing shortages, imposing discriminatory regulations, and strangling production with red tape. Above all, according to Nicolle, small employers "universally condemned" the Organization Committees as the instruments of unwanted state interference.[22] They demanded reform of these committees in order to trim the influence of the state, the civil servants, and the trusts.

One of the architects of Vichy's economic reforms, René Belin, later explained that this campaign against the Organization Committees arose because:

> The committees had to act, regulate, and intervene forcefully in the distribution of materials and of power, and in this way they impinged on private interests. . . . One point was that the designation of certain men to committee positions annoyed certain other men. Another was that the committees were obliged to operate in a period of sharp economic decline and that through a very simple-minded association of ideas they were being blamed for what in fact resulted inexorably from circumstances for which they were in no way responsible. Another reason . . . was that the committees had to pass through their own apprenticeship, seeking out their path and sometimes feeling their way through the worst difficulties. Again, they were not always as tactful as they might have been toward certain industrialists who had been for long . . . accustomed to total independence. It happened too, sometimes, that the responsible director of a committee was chosen intentionally to oppose the trade's own association.

As for the charge that the trusts had seized control of the Organization Committees and that small business was poorly represented, Belin admitted that it was difficult to find leaders outside of big business who had had experience in "the exercise of authority" and had the ability to create a staff and a policy "out of nothing."[23] Scholarly research has verified the contention that the wishes of big business prevailed in the operation of the Organization Committees.[24]

Of all the opponents of Darlan's experts the most strident were

[21] *Ibid.*, I, 194.

[22] *Ibid.*, I, 223. Also see *Les Nouveaux Temps,* March–October 1941.

[23] Hoover Institution, *German Occupation,* I, 151-52.

[24] Ehrmann, *Organized Business,* pp. 80-85; Léon Liebmann, "Entre le mythe et la légende: «l'anti-capitalisme» de Vichy," *Revue de l'Institut de sociologie,* no. 1 (1964), pp. 119-23.

the ultras or collaborationists in Paris. Indeed, it was their newspapers that later "exposed" the Synarchy to the general public. One of the ultra journalists was Marcel Déat, whose criticism of Vichy's *attentiste* or "wait and see" policies had landed him in prison when Laval was forced out of office. Shortly after the coup d'état of December 13 Déat joined with other extremists to launch a new political party aimed at restoring Laval to power. The Rassemblement national populaire, which Déat headed, was a fascist-style *parti unique* established to monopolize mass support for collaboration and a national socialist revolution. Throughout 1941 Déat and Laval remained in close contact.[25]

When Darlan's team took office, Déat denounced them as conservatives who were incapable of leading an economic and social revolution. Vichy, he wrote in *L'Oeuvre* (February 19, 1941) was the "affair of men who learned their sophistry from priests at school; now installed in positions of command in order to avoid responsibility, their senseless chatter only serves to gain them time while they are placing their bets at every table." Among Darlan's ministers Déat especially disliked Pucheu, whose "entire personality," it is said, "irritated" him, and Bouthillier, who seemed to personify the politically naïve civil servant.[26] Déat charged further that Pétain, instead of breaking up the trusts, had handed them control of the Organization Committees, which they operated to the detriment of merchants, artisans, and small- and medium-sized industrialists. An editorial in *L'Oeuvre* (February 26, 1941) stated that under Darlan the "Worms bank" had taken over the government and that its agents—Barnaud, Pucheu, Belin, Bouthillier *et al.*—intended to turn collaboration with Germany into a profit-making business deal.

In short, resentment against the technocrats and their reforms, especially against the Organization Committees, had existed well before the spring of 1941, when the incident occurred that touched off the Synarchy affair.[27] In Pétain's circle, within the business community, and among the ultra Parisian journalists many were ready to believe anything noxious about Darlan's team—even that they were diabolical conspirators. In the Byzantine atmosphere at Vichy it was

25 Claude Varennes, *Le Destin de Marcel Déat* (Paris, 1948), pp. 77, 127-28. "Claude Varennes" was the pseudonym for Georges Albertini, Déat's colleague and secretary of the new party. Later Albertini modified his statement by saying "contacts between the two men were still few in 1941" (Hoover Institution, *German Occupation,* III, 1209).

26 Varennes, *Destin de Marcel Déat,* pp. 147-48.

27 In March–April 1941 Nicolle recorded in his diary *(Cinquante mois,* I, 199, 205, 212, 217-19), that hostility toward the "Worms bank" clique was widespread at Vichy and in the Paris press.

relatively simple to spread such a story. Ever since the palace revolution that had ousted Pierre Laval, talk of plots and counterplots was commonplace. As the American ambassador Admiral William Leahy commented, "You could hear rumors about anything at any time in Vichy."[28] In such an ambiance rumors of a conspiracy—this one supposedly organized by Darlan's clan of experts—would find a receptive audience.

On May 19, 1941, a man fell to his death from the sixth floor of his Paris apartment. The deceased was Jean Coutrot, age forty-five, a businessman turned intellectual whose life and death became the second essential part of the legend of the Synarchy and was added to that of the growing resentment against the technocrats.

Jean Coutrot was an unusually progressive and enlightened French industrialist. He was more energetic, more gifted, more urbane, and more inclined toward philosophical speculation than most of his peers. He was a polytechnician who had fought in the First World War until a severe wound necessitated the amputation of a leg. After the war Coutrot, by virtue of his marriage, became the manager of a large paper company. Under the influence of American ideas on the scientific organization of work he rationalized the operation of his plant. His interest, however, shifted from the family business to studying the general problems raised by the process of industrialization. Coutrot wrote extensively about the need for streamlining work methods and for improving industrial relations in France, and he even published a wide-ranging and highly optimistic philosophical treatise.[29] In the late 1930's Coutrot either organized or participated in numerous study groups. He founded a school to study the scientific organization of work, a management counseling service, a study center for human problems, and an institute of applied psychology.

Of all his activities perhaps the most important was Coutrot's participation in the direction of X-Crise, a group founded by polytechnicians to discuss the issues raised by the depression, in which Coutrot aired his views. He soundly criticized economic liberalism, socialism, and communism as equally archaic and inhuman. In their place he proposed a new synthesis which he called "economic humanism"; in this scheme the individual was liberated from impersonal economic laws and oppressive bureaucracies.[30] He envisaged a system

28 William D. Leahy, *I Was There* (New York, 1950), p. 40.

29 Jean Coutrot, *De Quoi vivre* (Paris, 1935).

30 Coutrot, *L'Humanisme économique* (Paris, 1936). For Coutrot's ideas also see Guy Desaunay, "X-Crise, Contribution à l'étude des idéologies économiques d'un groupe de

of voluntary *ententes* or collective contracts for each branch of industry which would regulate both production and working conditions. Although he was vague about the rôle of trade associations and labor unions in the operation of these *ententes,* Coutrot was clear about the aims of such agreements: they were to introduce technical innovations and raise productivity while gaining working-class support through higher wages and shorter hours. In technocratic fashion he wanted experts to supervise these *ententes.* He also accepted the need for an interventionist state and called for a "planned sector" of the economy to provide the vital needs of food, housing, and clothing for every citizen at cost. To assist the working class he recommended a sliding wage scale and technical re-education for the unemployed, and to combat the current decline in production he urged devaluation and increasing productivity. Coutrot briefly served the Popular Front government as an adviser, but he was unable to introduce much of his program.[31] His influence within X-Crise and elsewhere is difficult to assess. He did attract some admirers among young managers and civil servants, a few of whom served at Vichy, but his domineering personality and unorthodox views also won him numerous opponents.[32]

Coutrot became unusually depressed after the outbreak of war and the defeat of 1940, which seemed to shatter his self-confidence. His visits to Vichy were brief and inconsequential. The war had separated him from his sons, while his wife was in southern France recuperating from tuberculosis. For some months Coutrot had been alone, confined to his Paris apartment. In the early morning of May 19 he fell to his death from a casement window. A few friends and relatives believed the fall was accidental, although the evidence points to suicide.[33] The inventors of the Synarchy legend, however, were to conceive a more sinister and sensational interpretation of his death: Coutrot was allegedly a member of the secret Mouvement synarchiste d'Empire (MSE) which he had betrayed. The MSE either forced him to jump, or else he was murdered and his body thrown from the win-

---

polytechniciens durant la grande crise économique, 1931-1939" (Unpublished diss., Université de Paris, 1965), pp. 104-5, 135, 150-51.

31 Bauchard, *Technocrates et le pouvoir,* pp. 39-42.

32 Desaunay, "X-Crise," pp. 174-76. None of the major technocrats at Vichy could be labeled Coutrot's disciples.

33 Roger Mennevée, who made a study of the Synarchy an avocation, carried out his own investigation into the circumstances of Coutrot's death. His findings make a strong case for a verdict of suicide: see the Papers of Roger Mennevée, carton 899/1549. These papers (which contain a large quantity of information on French political-financial affairs between 1910 and 1960) are housed in the University of California library at Los Angeles, and they include copies of nearly everything published about the Synarchy and the results of Mennevée's personal inquiries (hereafter cited as Mennevée papers).

dow to conceal the killing. The promoters of this version of Coutrot's death rest their case on one piece of evidence—the fact that he possessed a copy of the so-called MSE pact, which, they claim, he wrote. Here we must pause to describe the third and last piece of the Synarchy puzzle—the Martinist order and the MSE pact.

The Martinists were a real secret society whose origin dates back to the *Illuminati* of the eighteenth century.[34] In the 1880's the theosophist Dr. Papus (a pseudonym for Gerard Encausse) revived the defunct Masonic sect and won followers in France and abroad. This modern Martinist order had its own rites and an unusual method of recruitment, the "chain method," which protected the society from exposure: each new member knew the identity of only the Martinist who had recruited him.

Papus' teacher and the modern inspiration of Martinist thought was another connoisseur of the occult sciences, Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre. It was he who originated and popularized the notion of the Synarchy in the 1880's. By penetrating the mysteries of ancient religion and learning Saint-Yves claimed to have discovered God's law for the organization of society—the Order of the Synarchy. He believed that synarchs, or "holy men" who had mastered the secrets of the universe, had governed a scientific and theocratic utopia in prehistoric times. Hence the term "Synarchy" signified a world government by an initiated elite.[35] But the Synarchy had fallen on bad times and eventually the Papacy, with its sectarian and dogmatic beliefs, had nearly destroyed it. Only on some sacred and remote land in central Asia had the Synarchy survived. There in the Temple of the Agarttha, under the direction of high priests, twenty million people lived, free from war, tyranny, poverty, intolerance, and ignorance.

Mankind, according to Saint-Yves, had to make a choice between the Order of the Synarchy, which represented universal peace, prosperity, brotherhood, and enlightenment, or its opposite, the rule of anarchy. Europeans in particular needed to recognize how far they had wandered from God's social order. Their political institutions were based on oppression and popular ignorance while their reliance on military might for security threatened Europe with war. The im-

[34] For a history of the Martinists see Robert Ambelain, *Le Martinisme, histoire et doctrine* (Paris, 1946); Arthur E. Waite, *A New Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry* (London, 1921), I. 256-58, II, 157-63, 392-403; *Les Documents maçonniques*, no. 5 (Feb. 1944), pp. 129-33 and no. 7 (April 1944), pp. 185-90; Mennevée, *Documents*, Dec. 1947, pp. 4-12.

[35] The Larousse dictionary defines *Synarchie* as a "form of government in which several princes or sovereigns administer simultaneously the different parts of a state; by extension, authority exercised by a group of persons."

perialistic policies of the great powers were especially inhuman and unwise. Colonies, to this defender of universal brotherhood, represented greed, militarism, and tyranny at its worst. Furthermore, in their quest for colonies Europeans might invade the holy land of the Agarttha. Should the invaders profane the temple, he warned that "even if they were about to be conquered, the Templars and the Confederates of Agarttha could call to their aid the Cosmic Powers of the Earth and Sky, blowing up a part of this planet and pulverizing both the armed desecrators and their native land."[36]

In a slightly less apocalyptic vein Saint-Yves foresaw the triumph of the Order of the Synarchy within the nation state. Enlightened domestic reform meant to him the adoption of a form of corporativism based on the Judaeo-Christian tradition.[37] He contended that any society would contain a substratum of anarchy as long as the rulers alone were organized. Without a proper social organization for the people the only possible relation between ruler and ruled was that of oppressor and oppressed. As a cure Saint-Yves proposed creating corporativist councils to represent the people and to advise governments. Since France had the mission to lead the world to the Order of the Synarchy, he wrote the president of the Republic urging him to establish advisory councils representing the various sectors of the economy. These corporativist bodies would be the first step toward closing the gap between Frenchmen and their government. Saint-Yves warned that the only alternative to such synarchical reform was the rule of "the Beast" or anarchy.

Saint-Yves's thought became part of Martinist doctrine through the efforts of Papus. After the latter's death the Martinist order experienced a schism. In 1921 those who were loyal disciples of Saint-Yves and who shared his political interests established their own temple in Paris and called their cult the Ordre martiniste et synarchiste. While the older branch (Ordre martiniste) discarded Saint-Yves's teaching, the new dissident Martinist order dedicated itself to modernizing and promoting synarchical theory. Its founder and first grand master was Victor Blanchard, an official of the Chamber of Deputies.

It was Blanchard's schismatic Martinist order that spawned the mysterious Mouvement synarchiste d'Empire (MSE), a society founded in 1922 to win the world's elite to synarchical principles, and it was the MSE that, in turn, produced the key document in the legend of

[36] Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, *Mission de l'Inde en Europe, mission de l'Europe en Asie* (Paris, 1910), p. 28.

[37] Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, *La France vraie* (Paris, 1887), I, 142-46.

the Vichy Synarchy—the MSE pact.[38] The version of this strange book that has survived carried no author or date, but it must have been composed in the middle or late 1930's. Its cover was gilded and its first three pages were tinted red, white, and blue. It also carried a warning: it threatened any outsider who chanced upon the pact with drastic punishment should he fail to destroy it. The document contained thirteen principles and five hundred ninety-eight propositions. Surely it is one of the most platitudinous and repetitious blueprints for a utopia ever conceived. Although its aims are high-minded and certain reforms seem relevant, much of the program is so abstract and ethereal as to be devoid of usefulness as a guide to reform.

The ultimate aim of the MSE, according to the pact, was the creation of a universal empire by means of a nonviolent revolution. Within the new imperial federation nations submitted to a world government, the Synarchy, and achieved the highest goals of civilization—peace and humanity. No tyranny or oppression and no colonies existed in the bond of autonomous and pacific peoples. True to the inspiration of Saint-Yves the MSE assigned France the mission of leading the world to this utopia (No. 228).[39]

The revolution of the Synarchy was to begin with each nation's elite: "The synarchical order substitutes the conversion of the rulers for the revolt of the ruled" (No. vi.). The enlightened rulers would then introduce the new order and complete a bloodless revolution. The ruling elite, or *demos-aristocratie,* would renew itself by recruiting others who displayed talent and devotion to the people's welfare. The MSE pact described this synarchical state as "democratic" because the elite served the people (although it was not controlled by the people) and the political influence of all special interests was suppressed.

The MSE criticized both right- and left-wing extremists for being "inhuman": the Marxists sought "state socialism" and the "authoritarian collectivization of minds and bodies" while the hidebound conservatives led by the capitalist plutocracy and backed by the Church were headed inadvertently toward an even more oppressive régime of "state capitalism" (No. 79). Nor did the MSE approve of the French

[38] The pact is reproduced in its entirety in Henry Coston, *Les Technocrates et la synarchie,* special number of Lectures françaises (Feb. 1962), and in Geoffroy de Charnay, *Synarchie, panorama de 25 années d'activité occulte* (Paris, 1946). *Le Voile d'Isis* (1921-22), an official publication of the Ordre martiniste et synarchiste, presented the same ideas as those advanced by the MSE pact.

[39] No. 228, and subsequent such numbers in the text, refer to the numbered propositions of the MSE pact.

parliamentary system: the constitution of 1875 was a "foreign import" as unacceptable to Frenchmen as communism, fascism, or nazism (No. 80). Self-seeking interest groups and demagogic politicians bribed and duped an ignorant electorate and also checked the laudable efforts of high civil servants who tried to curb the corruption. (Saint-Yves was a royalist who had made a similar critique of the Third Republic.)

The economic and social program of the MSE was actually a refurbished form of Saint-Yves's corporativism; the obligatory *profession organisée*, a reform popular among French Freemasons during the 1930's, replaced Saint-Yves's crude corporativist scheme.[40] "The overriding concern of the MSE" and the "main instrument of the actual synarchical revolution" was the *profession organisée* or vocational organization (Nos. 344-46). Within the *profession organisée* a citizen was reconciled to the state's authority; without it citizenship was a meaningless abstraction and the "pseudo-citizen . . . would pillage, weaken, and corrupt" the state (No. 308). The *profession organisée*, however, was not the only means of economic reorganization proposed by the MSE; it also divided the economy into four sectors ("statist," "socialized," "controlled," and "free") which were directed by a *bureau du plan*. This planning agency staffed by *demos-technocrates*, who were chosen for their skills and their humanism (No. 445), coordinated the activities of the sectors. The MSE's reformed economy was supposed to be both more humane and more "democratic" because it sought to satisfy the people's needs rather than capitalists' profits. The socialist inclination of the MSE's economics is best seen in the statement that "private property, from a synarchical point of view, has first of all a social and public service function" (No. 424). Ultimately the synarchical utopia would be a perfect technocracy in which nature's gifts were scientifically utilized for man's benefit, thereby creating a "society of aristrocrats served by machines" (No. 99).

At this point we can return to the question of the relationship between the MSE and Jean Coutrot. According to the legend of the Vichy Synarchy Coutrot wrote the "gilded book" and gathered the French technocratic elite together into a secret society bent on seizing control of France; this scheme was part of a world-wide conspiracy masterminded by the sinister Synarchy. The study groups Coutrot founded, as the story goes, were front organizations for the MSE. The supposed "proof" of this contention rests on the alleged congruence

40 Mildred J. Headings, *French Freemasonry under the Third Republic* (Baltimore, 1949), p. 201.

between Coutrot's ideas and those contained in the pact, combined with the fact that he possessed a copy of it in his personal library. At present we have no direct evidence showing that he wrote the gilded book or even that he belonged to the MSE. But we do have sufficient knowledge of both Coutrot and the Martinists to contend that, contrary to legend, neither the pact nor the MSE was Coutrot's handiwork.

The MSE pact was clearly a Martinist tract, an updated version of Saint-Yves's utopianism and not Coutrot's original creation. The pact largely repeated Saint-Yves's pacifism, cosmopolitanism, anticolonialism, anticlericalism, and antiparliamentarianism; it was he who had conceived the notion of the Synarchy that the pact elaborated. As we have shown, the economic program advanced by the MSE was actually a renovated form of Saint-Yves's corporativism which closely resembled reforms advanced by French Masonry in the 1930's. Furthermore, the Masonic jargon, the peculiar membership "by chain," and the pose of secrecy all testify to the Martinist inspiration of the pact. Later, when the Synarchy rumor gained widespread notice the regular Martinist center in Lyons was raided by Vichy police. There and in the homes of other Martinists the police discovered copies of the pact. According to the testimony of the grand master of the regular Martinists the MSE pact was the work of the schismatic Ordre martiniste et synarchiste.[41] We know further that the Martinists were still active as late as 1940 in propagating Saint-Yves's reforms.[42] In short, the evidence points to the conclusion that the gilded book was not Coutrot's personal creation but an official Martinist tract.

Such a conclusion allows for the possibility that Coutrot's connection with the MSE was something more than mere possession of a copy of its pact. There was, in a general way, some similarity between his economic and social views and those of the MSE. Coutrot, like the MSE, proposed a kind of "economic humanism" as an alternative to Marxism and laissez-faire liberalism. He also favored planning and showed a preference for economic rule by technocrats.[43] Yet

41 Constant Chevillon, the grand master of the Ordre martiniste, stated that the pact came to him through a militant leftist, Jeanne Canudo, who was a member of the Ordre martiniste et synarchiste. A copy was also found at the residence of Gaston Martin, a deputy and a prominent Mason. See *Documents maçonniques*, no. 7 (April 1944), p. 185 and Coston, *Technocrates et la synarchie*, pp. 13-14. Bernard Faÿ, the head of Vichy's anti-Masonic agency, had also seen a copy of the pact before the war but had burned it (Mennevée papers, 899/1551).

42 An anonymous article in *La Phare de la Loire* (Dec. 29, 1940) entitled "The Synarchy, or the Union of Rulers and Ruled," urged the government at Vichy to use Saint-Yves's corporativist plan as a basis for national economic reorganization.

43 See Desaunay, "X-Crise," pp. 64-66. Coutrot and a number of other public figures

Coutrot's widow and a son deny that he wrote the pact.[44] Furthermore, there are differences between his economic views and those of the MSE. Coutrot was not a corporativist and did not stress the *profession organisée.*[45] Also he emphasized the scientific organization of work, increased productivity, and improved industrial relations—all of which the MSE ignored. Coutrot, at the time the pact was composed, was in his early forties; he was a shrewd businessman with firsthand experience in both industry and politics and the author of several original and penetrating economic studies. It seems unlikely that this hardheaded and urbane analyst of current affairs would have written or even taken seriously such Masonic utopianism. It is possible, however, that one of his numerous disciples may have helped write the section in the pact on economic reform and may have passed on a sample to Coutrot; or perhaps the author or authors sought his advice. Whatever the case his contribution must have been slight and indirect. More likely a copy had come into his possession more or less by accident, and he had kept it as a curiosity. Furthermore, no evidence exists that he was ever interested in any form of Freemasonry, and he was surely not the conspiratorial type. His method of reform was through study groups not subversion.[46] Though the MSE existed, its conspiracy was only a paper plot. Not one piece of evidence, besides the gilded book, has yet appeared to suggest that the MSE was anything more than an insignificant, harmless Masonic sect and its pact the product of its collective imagination.

Having unraveled the three different strands—the Vichy technocrats, Jean Coutrot, and the Martinists—that were later twisted together to form the legend of the Vichy Synarchy, we can now return to the narration of events. Unfortunately, evidence about the legend's birth is sparse. Yet even though details may be imprecise, it is possible to reconstruct the outline of how and why the affair began. The path of the legend's origin leads from Coutrot's Parisian apartment to

signed the *Plan du 9 Juillet* (1934), which proposed a program of political and economic reform designed to save France from the evils of both liberalism and totalitarianism.

44 Madame Coutrot in *La France intérieure,* no. 34 (July 15, 1945), p. 17 and author's interview with Antoine Coutrot, July 20, 1966.

45 Desaunay ("X-Crise," p. 161) concurs with this interpretation. A feeble attempt to demonstrate the "similarity" between Coutrot's ideas and those of the pact is made by Mennevée, *Documents,* April 1948, pp. 30-36.

46 Typical of the accusations made to inflate Coutrot's alleged rôle as organizer of the MSE was the mistake made by D. J. David (*France intérieure,* no. 29, Feb. 15, 1945, p. 9) who states that one of Coutrot's subversive publications was the periodical *Arc-en-ciel.* In reality *Arc-en-ciel* was his enlightened subscription plan: the subscriber was provided with a newspaper of a different political viewpoint for each day of the week, e.g., Monday—*L'Action française,* Tuesday—*L'Humanité,* etc.

Dr. Henri Martin's office at Vichy and from there to the editorial rooms of some Parisian journalists. In six months time—between March and August 1941—the legend was manufactured, embellished, and circulated.[47]

As we have said, a good many of Coutrot's colleagues resented his domineering personality; so did his brother-in-law. After a particularly heated argument between the two, the latter took Coutrot's copy of the MSE pact. The theft occurred about March 1941. The brother-in-law made certain accusations against Coutrot and gave the pact to a Colonel Heurteaux.

Heurteaux was an undercover operative for the Vichy government in Paris.[48] One of his tasks was to collect information on all political activity in the occupied capital and to transmit it to Vichy through a clandestine intelligence network directed by Colonel Georges Groussard. Before the war Groussard had acted as a liaison between certain army circles and a notorious secret society of super patriots called the Cagoule (or the hooded men).[49] In 1940 he gave the task of recruiting personnel for his intelligence team to an ex-Cagoulard leader, who naturally selected his old lieutenants as agents. One such agent and former Cagoulard was Martin—the man who created the legend of the Vichy Synarchy. The information from Heurteaux, including the pact, was communicated to Martin, who passed it to Pétain sometime in March or April.[50] By this time Martin had succeeded Groussard as director of the intelligence ring and as head of Vichy's special security police, the Groupes de Protection, both of which were under Pétain's direction though nominally attached to the Sûreté nationale.

Martin could be best described as a twentieth-century Auguste Blanqui. Every French regime since the Third Republic found reason to imprison this professional conspirator. He has been described as looking "a bit like Mephistopheles."[51] At one time a Maurrassian,

[47] The most complete account of the legend's origins is in Mennevée, *Documents,* May 1947, pp. 9-16 and Aug. 1947, pp. 53-65.

[48] For Heurteaux's intelligence work see Georges A. Groussard, *Service secret, 1940-1945* (Paris, 1964), pp. 79-83. Nicolle (*Cinquante mois,* I, 330) reported that Heurteaux "was one of the first to have the Synarchy document in his hands."

[49] For Groussard's activities see his *Service secret,* pp. 68-79, 83-97; and Louis Ducloux, *From Blackmail to Treason: Political Corruption and Crime in France, 1920-1940,* trans. Ronald Matthews (London, 1958), pp. 198-202. Ducloux, who investigated the Cagoule for the Sûreté nationale in 1937, viewed Groussard's intelligence operation as a regrouping of former Cagoulards. According to their directives these agents were to gather information about all "anti-national intrigues," especially about the activities of Freemasons and Communists. For accounts of the Cagoule by former Sûreté officials see Ducloux, *From Blackmail to Treason,* pp. 159-92, and Jean Belin, *Secrets of the Sûreté* (New York, 1950), pp. 210-40.

[50] Letter to author from Henri Martin, Jan. 1968.

[51] Roger Stéphane, *Chaque homme est lié au monde* (Paris, 1946), I, 198, 212. In

he had eventually broken with the Action française because of its reluctance to seize power by means of a coup d'état. In the late 1930's he directed the *deuxième bureau* of the Cagoule. The Cagoule bore a strong resemblance to the MSE. Both were conspiratorial societies, although the Cagoule differed in its reliance on violence. Strangely enough, although the Cagoule was an archenemy of Freemasonry, it imitated Masonic ritual, symbolism, and method of recruitment. The former head of the Cagoule, Eugène Deloncle, likened its recruiting procedures to the "chain method" of the *Illuminati.*[52] And, like the MSE, the Cagoule claimed to punish informers pitilessly, or as one initiate put it, to "kill them like rabbits."[53] Martin was accordingly thoroughly acquainted with the language of Freemasonry and responsive to any suggestion of a Masonic plot. His hatred and fear of Freemasons, as well as Communists, Jews, and plutocrats stemmed from his passionate xenophobia: he was the declared enemy of "all Internationals." Of all the political programs of wartime France Martin's views were closest to those of the Parisian fascists. He shared their enthusiasm for a "true National Revolution" and distrusted Vichy's *attentistes*—yet at least in early 1941 he still looked to Pétain for leadership. Martin was abnormally suspicious and embittered but a man of great personal courage.[54] Most important, he was obsessed with the idea of conspiracy. He studied the theory and practice of political subversion and believed political events were caused by plots and counterplots. As for his opponents he assumed that they were devious and unscrupulous: "Martin accepts unquestioningly everything he is told against his adversaries. He does not seek to verify suppositions, and even transforms these into facts."[55]

Little wonder then that when information on the MSE arrived at Martin's desk he accepted it as proof of a vast Masonic-Jewish-plutocratic-technocratic conspiracy against the National Revolution. In fact he had begun his investigation into what he called a "massive infiltration . . . of polytechnicians and inspectors of finance" into

this memoir (I, 198-250 *passim*) Roger Stéphane records his impressions of Martin during their months together in prison (1943-44). Martin's conspiratorial exploits did not end with the war. As recently as January 1960 the sixty-eight-year-old activist participated in a right-wing plot to keep Algeria French.

52 *La Gerbe,* Sept. 25, 1941.

53 J.-R. Tournoux, *L'Histoire secrète* (Paris, 1962), pp. 39-42.

54 Courage was a family trait of the Martins. His wife, for example, smuggled weapons to him in prison. Two days after the Allied landings in Normandy Martin's son and six other boys convinced the eighty police guarding his father's prison that they were an advance patrol of a large force of the *maquis.* The frightened guards let all the inmates escape; then Martin, his son, daughter, and wife all joined the *maquis* (Stéphane, *Chaque homme,* I, 281).

55 *Ibid.,* I, 250.

the Vichy government in the fall of 1940. One of Pétain's closest advisers, the Minister of Justice Raphaël Alibert (another former Maurrassian), had urged Martin to launch his search, and Pétain himself encouraged him and offered to protect him.[56]

For Pétain the Freemasons were a *bête noire par excellence.*[57] Like many French conservatives he believed the policies of the Third Republic had been decided behind the doors of the Masonic lodges. He wanted this left-wing, anticlerical, cosmopolitan association of freethinkers, who would undoubtedly oppose his National Revolution, exposed and suppressed. In August 1940 a series of decrees outlawed all clandestine organizations, and confiscated their property and records. Government officials who had belonged to secret societies were required to declare their past affiliations and dignitaries of such orders were excluded from public office. Pétain even attached to his staff a special anti-Masonry agency, headed by Bernard Fay. It had its own police force and published a journal, *Les Documents maçonniques.* Under Pétain the French administration experienced a kind of anti-Masonic McCarthyism in which the unmasking of Freemasons in high places became a patriotic act. This purge naturally gave rise to rumors that the suppressed societies were planning to take their revenge on the National Revolution.

Martin's investigation into a conspiracy against Pétain therefore received direct support from the head of state himself. The arrival of the MSE pact had spurred the intelligence chief to think he had uncovered the plans of the conspirators, and news of Jean Coutrot's sudden and violent death in May convinced him that the time had come to expose the sinister scheme. Before the end of May he completed a brief, anonymous report, the so-called "Martin note" and ordered his agents to distribute it to government officials and to the public.[58] By the first week in June the document was already being discussed at Vichy.

The content of the Martin note is important since it presented the original version of the legend of the Vichy Synarchy. This circular reported the existence of a secret society called the Synarchy and predicted "great difficulties" at Vichy because of it. The society was supposed to have been exposed by an "indiscretion" of one of its organizers, Jean Coutrot who, the note implies, had been murdered for his mistake. The Synarchy, according to Martin, was composed "almost

[56] Letter to author from Henri Martin, Jan. 1968.

[57] Robert Aron, *Histoire de Vichy, 1940-1944* (Paris, 1954), p. 225.

[58] Tournoux, *L'Histoire secrète*, p. 172. For the Martin note itself see Bouthillier, II, 526-28, or Mennevée, *Documents*, May 1947, pp. 27-29.

exclusively of polytechnicians and inspectors of finance" bound together by an oath; its headquarters was the "Worms bank." According to the note the Synarchy's aims were: (1) to check the "socialist" thrust of Pétain's National Revolution; (2) to protect Jewish, Anglo-Saxon, and other international business interests; and (3) to block efforts to organize continental Europe into an economic unit that excluded the Anglo-Saxons. The Synarchy's leaders were: Bouthillier and Leroy-Ladurie; their henchmen were Barnaud, Lehideux, Belin, Bichelonne, Pucheu, and a few other civil servants. These men supposedly had gathered together in July 1940 to further two immediate goals: (1) to gain control of all French industry by establishing the Organization Committees; (2) "to eliminate from the government individuals with revolutionary tendencies or national socialist sympathies." Included in the latter category were Laval, the ultras' current favorite, and Raphaël Alibert, a former associate of the Cagoule and close friend of Martin.[59] The Martin note called Laval's dismissal on December 13 by Bouthillier "the final victory" of the Synarchy.

Martin had crudely pasted together the MSE plot, the activities of Jean Coutrot, and the policies of the Vichy technocrats, and thereby had manufactured the rumor that was to become the legend of the Vichy Synarchy. To discredit Darlan's team and what seemed to him to be a policy of *attentisme* he "exposed" it as a group of subversives in the pay of foreign business interests; by this means Martin hoped to turn Vichy back to social revolution and close collaboration with Germany. Most important, he exploited the existing antagonism against the technocrats' reforms, especially against the Organization Committees. We know, for example, that Pierre Nicolle, the lobbyist for small business, fed Martin information to be used against the technocrats.[60] The Martin note, in short, not only articulated the differences between the technocrats and the ultras, but also reflected a truly significant historical controversy—the conflict between technocratic and antitechnocratic forces and attitudes in modern France.

The charges made by Martin were, of course, trumped up. The relationship between the MSE and Coutrot, as has been explained, was remote and tenuous at most. Discrepancies between the aims attributed to the Vichy technocrats by the Martin note and those advanced by the MSE pact are obvious. According to its pact the MSE was antiplutocratic and pseudo-socialist while Darlan's team, according to the

[59] On Alibert and the Cagoule see Tournoux, *Histoire secrète*, pp. 28*n*, 133. Martin, of course, ignored the fact that Alibert was one of the principal agents of Laval's fall on December 13!

[60] Letter to author from Henri Martin, Jan. 1968.

Martin note, were agents of the plutocracy and enemies of socialism! In addition, while the technocrats, according to Martin, were the pawns of Jewish-Anglo-Saxon interests, the MSE pact reveals not the slightest trace of such sympathies. Martin ignored such contradictions in trying to tie Darlan's experts to the MSE and thus surround them with the sinister aura of conspiracy.

While Martin's office at Vichy was busy circulating his memorandum, one of his agents[61] transmitted the story to two Parisian journalists—Pierre Constantini and Jean Mamy—a pair of collaborationists. Constantini, who was mentally deranged, had organized a pro-Nazi political league whose main enemy was "Jewish Freemasonry." On June 5, 1941, Constantini and Mamy published small notices in two different collaborationist papers calling attention to Coutrot's "sudden and mysterious death."[62] These notices were but the beginning of the ultras' press campaign against the technocrats.

At this time the Martin note also came into the hands of Raoul Husson, a former official at the Statistique générale de la France and a distant acquaintance of Coutrot's.[63] For some months Husson had been carrying out his own inquiry into the defeat of France. As a political leftist he was convinced that the responsibility for the defeat in 1940 must rest with some form of right-wing, antirepublican conspiracy like the Cagoule. Husson had also been a Mason; he had seen and copied the MSE pact. This discovery led him to investigate the history of Martinism. When Martin's memorandum reached him, Husson became convinced that the MSE had been instrumental in bringing about the capitulation in 1940. Husson then completed a lengthy report on the Synarchy. He apparently discussed his findings too openly, however, because in early July German and French police inspectors arrested him and confiscated his report. One copy of Husson's report went to the Sûreté nationale at Vichy. The chief of the Sûreté, Henry Chavin, who harbored his own grievances against the technocrats, "adopted" Husson's work and began circulating it at

61 Mennevée identified this informer as Richard de Grandmaison, a shady double agent, who while working for the German subsidized press claimed to be an agent of the Sûreté nationale (Mennevée papers, 899/864 and file 15880 of the Biographie contemporaine).

62 *L'Appel* and *Au Pilori*. Also see *Au Pilori*, July 10, 1941.

63 Mennevée papers, 899/1548 and Répertoire de biographie. After the war Husson used the pseudonym "Geoffroy de Charnay" to publish his book on the Synarchy (see n.38). In the early postwar years he also served as Mennevée's chief informant on the Synarchy though the former kept Husson's identity secret. Even in his private papers Mennevée refers to a mysterious personnage as "H. de S." If it were not for a few marginalia, the fact that "H de S" meant "Husson of the Synarchy" would still be a puzzle, as would the identity of the author of the Chavin report. "D. J. David" was a second pseudonym used by Husson (see nn.46, 93.)

Vichy in July.[64] This twenty-two page anonymous document became known as the "Chavin report."

A "Confidential Report on the Secret Society of Polytechnicians called the MSE . . ." was the actual title of the Chavin report.[65] It repeated verbatim most of the charges made by Martin's note and added detailed information on the history of Martinism and Coutrot's career. The list of synarchs at Vichy grew, with Chavin's report, to over forty and included new names like that of Benoist-Méchin, Du Moulin, Jacques Rueff, Alfred Sauvy, and Eugène Deloncle. Husson probably added Deloncle to his list because of his hatred for the Cagoulards. Husson's socialist interpretation, which necessarily differs from Martin's, was that the Synarchy was an international capitalist conspiracy against the working class. The Synarchy was supposedly using the MSE to subvert French business and the state administration, and relied on the Cagoule to infiltrate the army. As a means of coming to power, according to Husson, the Synarchy had engineered the Republic's military defeat by Germany. It had then installed its agents in every Vichy ministry and created the Organization Committees to control the economy and subdue the working class. In the end the story of the Synarchy proved to be a flexible tool; it could be utilized by both left-wing socialists or national socialists to attack Vichy as the "rule of the plutocracy."

The Martin note and the Chavin report set the mimeograph machines at Vichy to work producing copies, summaries, critiques, and a few imaginative embellishments of the story. One such version "identified" the Synarchy's agents outside France: Charles Lindbergh in the United States, Lord Rothermere in Great Britain, and Hermann Gœring—the head of the MSE in Germany![66] Facsimiles of the Chavin report passed from hand to hand. The rumor of the Synarchy spread up and down the corridors at Vichy until by August everyone from the doorman of the Hôtel du Parc to Pétain had heard it. It was said that on July 30 measures had even been taken by certain prefects to forestall a possible coup d'état by the Synarchy.[67]

[64] Chavin's motives are not altogether clear, but his quarrel with Pucheu probably stemmed from the latter's reorganization of the Sûreté. As the new minister of the interior (July 18) Pucheu discharged a good many police inspectors (Paul Buttin, ed., *Le Procès Pucheu* [Paris, 1947], p. 137), and it was just about this time that Chavin circulated "his" report.

[65] For reproductions of the Chavin report see Nicolle, *Cinquante mois*, I, 511-32, or Mennevée, *Documents*, Aug. 1947, pp. 26-50.

[66] Desaunay, "X-Crise," p. 163. For a list of the anonymous exposés and the published material on the Synarchy that appeared between 1940 and 1945 see Charnay, *Synarchie*, pp. xxi-xlii.

[67] Nicolle, *Cinquante mois*, I, 305.

Quickly the rumor spread from the hotel lobbies of Vichy to the newspaper offices of the ultras in Paris. On August 1 the front page of Déat's *L'Oeuvre* splashed the Synarchy smear before the general public. Déat had been voicing his misgivings about Darlan's bloodless experts, the Anglophile "Worms bank," and the plutocratic Organization Committees for months. Now he had a new weapon—the Synarchy story. *L'Oeuvre's* editorial attacked a brotherhood of polytechnicians and inspectors of finance who worked for the Synarchy and intended to sabotage the National Revolution for the benefit of the trusts. They had supposedly undermined the social revolution, the formation of a *parti unique,* and Franco-German collaboration. Subsequent articles in *L'Oeuvre* (August 2 and 3) suggested that "the Worms gang" and their "archangel Gabriel" (Leroy-Ladurie) were behind the Synarchy and the policy of *attentisme.*

We know now that Déat attacked Darlan's technocrats "without having had the slightest proof of the existence of this occult government." His own right-hand man revealed that Déat believed the Synarchy plot because it seemed plausible and because "he didn't see what place he [Déat himself] would have in the regime that [the technocrats] wanted."[68] Déat identified the members of the Synarchy purely "by chance"—all polytechnicians and heads of "technical ministries" were guilty. According to Déat's colleague the list of accused grew "at the whim of editorial rooms short of copy."[69]

The fascist press campaign reached a climax on August 21 when Pierre Constantini wrote an open letter to Marshal Pétain on the front page of his paper *L'Appel*: "*I accuse* an organized band of having fomented conspiracy against the life and the future of the nation." Constantini repeated all the charges made against the Synarchy by Martin and requested Pétain to launch an official inquiry. Jean Mamy added "background" to the plot by pointing out that "there is nothing more Jewish" than Saint-Yves's idea of the Synarchy. Mamy called the MSE a *mafia d'X* (X to designate the Polytechnique) and suggested that Coutrot was either murdered or "ordered" to commit suicide by this "mafia." Neither Constantini nor Mamy identified the synarchs at Vichy, but this may have been a result of German censorship.

The figure of Laval lurks in the shadows of this campaign against Darlan's technocrats. Those ultras like Martin, Déat, and Constantini who propagated the Synarchy polemic did so, at least in part, to help

[68] Varennes, *Destin de Marcel Déat,* p. 140. For his part Bouthillier *(Drame de Vichy,* II, 276) believed Déat initiated his attack because he had been left out of Darlan's government in February.

[69] Varennes, *Destin de Marcel Déat,* p. 141.

the former head of government back to power. Recall that the Martin note assailed those who had ousted Laval in December 1940. But whether or not Laval encouraged these propagandists is not clear. He did try to discredit Darlan by rumor and he knew of the MSE pact.[70] He was also in contact with Déat and did not disapprove of the ultras' efforts to return him to power.[71] At least one of the technocrats believed Laval may have inspired the whole affair.[72]

By late August the outcry against the Synarchy became too disquieting for some of Darlan's technocrats not to heed it. Pucheu, the fire-eating minister of the interior, retaliated. He silenced Constantini and Mamy by threatening to arrest them.[73] Simultaneously Déat's *L'Oeuvre* abruptly stopped its attacks on the Synarchy.[74] Pucheu was especially irritated with Chavin, the *directeur* of the Sûreté nationale, for assisting the rumormongers. Pucheu gained satisfaction by sacking Chavin; even Martin, who had vainly counted on Pétain for protection, eventually fell victim to Pucheu's vengeance. The doctor was put in prison in March 1942, where he remained until the Liberation. Pucheu's repressive measures succeeded in keeping the affair out of the press for almost two years, but did little to halt the spread of the rumor in government circles[75] where the credulous, of course, believed that his reaction only proved the veracity of the charge.

It is not easy to assess the effects of the Synarchy affair on Vichy politics; certainly they were not inconsequential. No doubt the affair impaired relations between Darlan's team and Pétain. Recall that the marshal was deeply suspicious of all secret societies, especially of the Masonic variety. His entourage, moreover, was one of the principal

70 Maurice-Yvan Sicard's memoir (Saint-Paulien [pseud.], *Histoire de la collaboration*, Paris, 1964) is not an entirely trustworthy source, but he was a member of the arch-collaborationist circle. He tells the story (p. 295) of Laval's charging the journalist Henry Coston with the task of "proving" that Darlan was close to the Freemasons. When Coston returned empty-handed, Laval told him the slightest trace of evidence would suffice, e.g., that Darlan had once addressed a lodge. At that point Coston reminded the former premier that he himself had spoken before the Masons! Sicard also states (p. 204) that Deloncle showed the pact to Laval. Deloncle's rôle in this affair is unclear. The former Cagoulard leader had been close to Martin before June 1940 but not after. Deloncle was on good terms with Laval, Darlan, and Déat for brief periods, but almost all his political friendships were ephemeral and quickly turned to enmities. In fact both Laval and Déat believed that Deloncle was responsible for the attempt to assassinate them on August 27, 1941 (Hoover Institution, *German Occupation*, III, 1507; Tournoux, *Histoire secrète*, p. 141).

71 Varennes, *Destin de Marcel Déat*, p. 128.

72 Aujol, *Procès Benoist-Méchin*, pp. 44-45.

73 *L'Appel*, Aug. 26, 1943. The Germans may have intervened to save the two journalists from further punishment (Bauchard, *Technocrates et le pouvoir*, p. 144).

74 The assassination attempt of August 27 (see n.70) halted Déat's activities and thereafter his paper turned its attention to other subjects.

75 Nicolle, *Cinquante mois*, I, 311-54 *passim*.

centers of Maurrassian antitechnocratic sentiment. Gillouin, Fernet, Du Moulin, and others warned Pétain against the "vaulting ambitions" of the experts and their servitude to the trusts. At one point the Sûreté, which was engaged in a feud with Pucheu, confiscated one of the impetuous minister's private letters and turned it over to Pétain. The letter supposedly stated Pucheu's hopes of replacing Pétain as head of state.[76] Under pressure from his staff the marshal may well have considered replacing Pucheu.[77] Pétain later said: "When something was going badly at Vichy . . . they whispered to me, 'It's the work of the Synarchy!' Rainy weather, perchance? Again the Synarchy!"[78] He probably never believed that the Synarchy was a nefarious plot,[79] but the rumor heightened his natural suspicions of Darlan's team and deprived them of his valuable support.

Pétain was sensitive to the charge that the trusts had disrupted his plans for economic renewal. His staff, certain employers' associations, and the ultra press were already clamoring in unison that the Organization Committees were too partial to big business. The Synarchy polemic only deepened the controversy. This affair reached its peak in August and probably helped prompt the head of state to deliver his famous antitrust speech. On the evening of August 12 Pétain made a rather dramatic radio broadcast that revealed his disappointment with the progress of the National Revolution. He touched on a wide range of topics, and while never mentioning the Synarchy by name, he complained about the "atmosphere of false rumors and intrigues" and discussed the general controversy which the affair pointed up. He criticized the collaborationist press for its unwarranted attacks against his government; he also called for disciplinary measures against all government officials who were guilty of false declarations about previous membership in secret societies. But most important Pétain confessed how, despite his intentions, the "servants of the trusts" had in certain instances used the Organization Committees for their own ends. He promised to reorganize these bodies to make them less overbearing and more representative of small-business interests.[80]

76 Général Bernard Serrigny, *Trente Ans avec Pétain* (Paris, 1959), pp. 198-99.

77 Du Moulin, *Temps des illusions,* pp. 323-33.

78 Quoted in Tournoux, *Histoire secrète,* p. 295.

79 After making inquiries about the Synarchy and about Martin's arrest Pétain supposedly closed the incident by telling the council of ministers simply: "Gentlemen, I have learned that people are talking about a plot of the Synarchy. I looked in the dictionary and found: 'Synarchy—meeting of the best men.' Well, in that case, I'd certainly like nothing but synarchs around me." Quoted in Bauchard, *Technocrates et le pouvoir,* p. 145.

80 Philippe Pétain, *Quatre Années au pouvoir* (Paris, 1949), p. 120.

The technocrats in turn resisted Pétain's request for reform of the Organization Committees. François Lehideux, secretary of state for industrial production, argued that it was inopportune to encourage opposition to the new committees. But Lehideux had to give way and in September he announced plans to revamp the structure of the Organization Committees and to prosecute those officials who had abused their authority in the "trusts' interests." Yet true to his cause he promised that once the committees were reorganized he would not "hesitate to reinforce their control over their members and to perfect the system of sanctions."[81] In the end the reform of the committees changed their substance but little, and the technocrats' preferences prevailed in their operation.[82]

Relations between Pétain's staff and Darlan's team had been tense even before the Synarchy rumor began. Then in the fall of 1941 the two factions—one led by Pétain's jealous aide Du Moulin, the other by Pucheu—engaged in a bitter and protracted feud. Du Moulin considered Darlan's team an ambitious and amateurish cabal. He bore a special grudge against the arrogant and aggressive minister of the interior, and advised Pétain to remove Pucheu before he became too entrenched. At a cabinet meeting in October the quarrel finally surfaced. In a heated exchange the two antagonists lost their self-control. Pucheu rashly accused Du Moulin of currying favor with the Germans. From there, according to Du Moulin, "the argument degenerated. Invectives were hurled. Then, suddenly fed up, I went for the door: 'I cannot stay one more minute in your office, sir, in the presence of people who aren't even speaking French!' And I slammed the door on my way out." The feud spread as each man mobilized his supporters. "For five months . . . ," Du Moulin wrote, "Vichy seemed divided into two camps, where every evening tracer-bullets were exchanged."[83] The latter admitted that the quarrel embittered relations within government circles, wasted time, and in general had detrimental effects on the government's morale.

The Synarchy affair had some impact on Vichy's foreign relations as well as on its domestic politics. To the German occupation authorities the rumor seemed plausible enough to call for an investigation into its ramifications and to keep the technocrats under surveillance.

81 État français, Ministère de l'Intérieur, *Informations générales*, no. 53 (Sept. 2, 1941), p. 625.

82 Ehrmann (*Organized Business*, p. 83) points out, for example, that Bichelonne as minister of industrial production tried unsuccessfully to draw Léon Gingembre, a spokesman for small- and medium-sized industry, into his cabinet.

83 Du Moulin, *Temps des illusions*, pp. 336-37.

But Dr. Elmar Michel, who at the time was chief of the economic section of the German military administration in France, came to believe that the rumors of a political conspiracy were erroneous and that Darlan's team was merely "a very open circle of young business experts." And since he found the latter to be "very understanding" of the Reich's war effort and eager for economic collaboration with Germany, he could afford to ignore the rumors.[84] German inquiries turned up nothing, so they eventually dropped the affair.

The fictitious plot proved more deleterious to Vichy's relations with the United States. Surely relations between the two governments during 1941 would have been seriously strained without the Synarchy polemic, but the rumor did aggravate their problems. The United States was anxious about the influence of any collaborationists who might weaken Pétain's will to resist German demands. Yet Washington was unsure about the true character of the political struggles within France, and when the story cropped up of a plot at Vichy our diplomats tended to be overly credulous. Their dispatches described Darlan's team as a cabal of collaborationists who were pro-Nazi out of economic self-interest. The fact that the true collaborationists who manufactured the rumor regarded the team as *attentistes* was ignored. The United States ambassador in London relayed details from the Chavin report while our military intelligence prepared a study on the "Activities of Banque Worms et Cie."[85] Our ambassador to France, Leahy, reported that a " 'palace guard' had developed around the Marshal which directed its efforts to building up a political organization" as an underpinning for the existing government.[86] And if the semi-official history of our Vichy policy accurately reflects thinking at Washington, the Worms clique was "as good fascists as any in Europe . . . . Many of them had long had extensive and intimate business relations with German interests and were still dreaming of a new system of 'synarchy,' which meant government of Europe on fascist principles by an international brotherhood of financiers and industrialists."[87] Contrary to Washington's version, Darlan's team, of course, was neither fascists nor even "dyed-in-the-wool collaborationists" and it was not controlled by the Maison Worms or the plutocracy.

[84] Michel's statements appear in *La France intérieure*, no. 51 (Dec. 15, 1946), pp. 5-6. Though his remarks are reputedly from an official report of the German *Militärverwaltung*, they seem more like personal postwar reminiscences. In 1950 he added that Darlan's technocrats had defended French interests with courage and skill and deserved well of their countrymen (Hoover Institution, *German Occupation*, III, 1634).

[85] William L. Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble* (New York, 1947), pp. 168-69.

[86] Leahy, *I Was There*, p. 51.

[87] Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, p. 168.

In November 1941 Darlan removed General Maxime Weygand as governor-general of North Africa. Washington's confidence in Vichy's will to resist was seriously shaken by this action, for the United States government regarded Weygand as the chief obstacle to German influence in North Africa. From Algiers Robert Murphy explained the dismissal as the result of "German pressure and the eagerness of the cabal consisting of Darlan, Benoist-Méchin, Pucheu, Lehideux and Marion to eliminate Weygand."[88] From Vichy Leahy wrote President Roosevelt on November 22 that "the government of France today headed by a feeble, frightened old man surrounded by self-seeking conspirators is altogether controlled by this group, which probably for its own safety, is devoted to the Axis philosophy."[89] Our ambassador identified Darlan's technocrats as the "conspirators'" leaders. For a moment following Weygand's fall the State Department considered, but then rejected, the idea of stopping our program of economic assistance to North Africa as a rebuff to Vichy. Thus to some degree the Synarchy affair seems to have placed additional stress on Vichy-American relations by encouraging the United States to believe that under Darlan, the government at Vichy was in the hands of a pro-Nazi cabal eager to move France into Hitler's camp. This belief was not entirely mistaken, but it was a harmful distortion of the technocrats' true position.

Contrary to what one might expect had the Synarchy really existed, Darlan's team did not desert Vichy en masse once the admiral fell from power in April 1942. Instead they gradually drifted away from politics at different times and for different reasons. When Laval returned to replace Darlan as head of the government, Belin, Bouthillier, and Lehideux resigned before Laval could dismiss them. Pucheu became disenchanted with Laval and crossed over to North Africa to join the anti-Vichy forces, but there he was arrested, tried, and executed for treason. Benoist-Méchin, who stayed on until September 1942, served on Laval's personal staff. Barnaud continued as a delegate to the armistice commission until German troops occupied southern France in November 1942 and, in his eyes, deprived Vichy of all authority. Only one of the leading technocrats remained to the end and moved to Germany with Pétain in 1944. Bichelonne, still believing in a German victory, died on the east side of the Rhine. Once

[88] U.S. Dept. of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1941* (Wash., D.C., 1959), II, 466. Murphy was at that time the State Department's liaison with General Weygand.

[89] Leahy, *I Was There*, p. 469.

dissolved the team was never reconstituted even though many of its members survived and held important posts after the war.

Although Darlan's team dispersed after 1942 the Synarchy legend remained alive. Indeed, it grew. First, as the war drew to a close the fascist press in Paris revived the campaign it had initiated in 1941; then during the Liberation the legend reappeared in a new leftist version.

Pucheu's flight to North Africa in 1943 aroused his old ultra enemies. Constantini's paper congratulated itself for having unmasked Pucheu and the other traitorous synarchs two years earlier.[90] The fascist intellectual, Robert Brasillach, suggested that Pucheu and the Synarchy were responsible for the loss of North Africa to the Allies.[91] By 1944 there was no limit to the absurdities that the pro-Nazi press could fabricate about the Synarchy. One such paper claimed that the Synarchy had sabotaged the Popular Front, arranged both the war and the defeat of 1939-40, subverted the National Revolution, helped the Allies invade North Africa, and, most recently, financed the Resistance and organized the black market! It was the MSE, not Germany, which was to blame for the exorbitant price of milk in France.[92] One wonders whether such fantastic accusations seemed plausible to anyone, including their authors.

The Liberation of France silenced those collaborationists who had invented and perpetuated the Synarchy affair but did not suppress the legend. The Synarchy proved to be an adaptable and enduring polemic. The Left reinterpreted it to discredit the men of Vichy. Formerly the Synarchs were pro-Anglo-American, pro-Jewish *attentistes,* but in the new version offered by the Socialists and Communists they were pro-Nazi collaborationists. The Left's version, however, still retained the basic principle that the Synarchy was a secret society of international capitalists and included the usual embellishments about Coutrot, the Polytechnique, and the Martinists. Emphasis, of course, was placed on the Synarchy's hostility to the working class.

During 1944-47 the Synarchy affair received a great deal of publicity. Efforts were made to verify the story's authenticity while the left-wing press produced extensive exposés.[93] Communist attacks forced

90 *L'Appel,* Aug. 26, 1943.

91 *Je suis partout,* Dec. 18, 1942.

92 *Le Reveil du peuple,* March 29, 1944.

93 Most notable of these are: D. J. David in *La France intérieure,* Feb. 15 and March 15, 1945; *L'Action,* Oct. 5, 12, 19 and Nov. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, 1945; Charnay, *Synarchie* (1946); Mennevée, *Documents,* June 1946, May, Aug., Oct., Dec. 1947, April, Oct. 1948, and Jan. 1949. In his papers Mennevée (899/1560-61) kept hundreds of newspaper clippings on the Synarchy from these years. Also see Charles Dumas, *La France trahie et livrée*

prominent leaders like Alfred Sauvy, General Henri Giraud, Christian Pineau, and François Perroux to deny any knowledge of the Synarchy. The publication at this time of Pierre Nicolle's and Du Moulin's memoirs only fed the controversy. Even though Du Moulin stated that the MSE plot was about as real as the Loch Ness monster, his book contained a colorful and biting indictment of Darlan's team, whom he unfortunately labeled "synarchs."

After the flurry of activity during the Liberation, discussion of the Synarchy faded. Official investigations brought no confessions, only denials. At his trial Benoist-Méchin gave a typical response when questioned about the Synarchy. He declared that all he knew about it came from the newspaper.[94] Judicial inquiries into the wartime activities of the Maison Worms produced only more evidence that the Synarchy was a fiction. Instead of enjoying a privileged position during the war, the enterprise had lost eight million francs. Nor did Worms et Cie. gain any exemption from wartime racial legislation. Furthermore, three tribunals cleared the firm of any charge of economic collaboration.[95]

In recent years serious scholars have rejected the view that the Synarchy was a lurid plot and have interpreted it as a simple clique of young technocrats who shared a common mentality and similar objectives.[96] Yet a few die-hards refuse to give up. Certain political journalists have tried to revive the legend by linking it to the current controversy over technocracy in France.[97] Perhaps a few activists still nurse a grudge against the legendary Synarchy since at the height of the Algerian crisis in 1961 someone saw fit to explode a bomb in front of the Maison Worms.[98]

(Paris, 1944), pp. 172-82, and Roger Guillien, *Les Trusts contre la patrie* (Paris, 1944). Even a semiofficial history of Martinism published in 1946 (Ambelain, *Martinisme,* p. 168) professed belief in the existence of the Synarchy as a plutocratic conspiracy yet denied that the Martinists had any connection with it.

94 Aujol, *Procès Benoist-Méchin,* p. 43. See also Barnaud, *Commission d'enquête,* VIII, 2290-2304; Louis Noguères, *Le véritable Procès du Maréchal Pétain* (Paris, 1955), p. 150*n*; Bouthillier, *Drame de Vichy,* II, 278-79.

95 Barnaud, *Commission d'enquête,* VIII, 2285-90; Aron, *Histoire de Vichy,* p. 382.

96 *Ibid.,* pp. 381-82; Bauchard, *Technocrates et le pouvoir,* pp. 143-50; Desaunay, "X-Crise," pp. 159-66; Ehrmann, *Organized Business,* p. 75; Paul Farmer, *Vichy: Political Dilemma* (New York, 1955), pp. 265-66; Tournoux, *Histoire secrète,* pp. 168-73. Cf. the implausible new version by Sicard (*Histoire de la collaboration,* pp. 207-8) that the Synarchy rumor was merely a "bluff" perpetrated by the technocrats themselves to win them more respect!

97 Coston, *Technocrates et la synarchie;* see n.1.

98 At least one ultranationalist blamed the Synarchy for the loss of Algeria: Pierre de Villemarest (*Le 14e Complot du 13 mai* [Paris, 1960]), contends that the synarchs who controlled the world oil trusts brought an end to the Algerian war because it hindered their plans to seize control of the mineral deposits of Africa.

In reviewing the documentary evidence that supports the conspiratorial view of the Synarchy, one is struck by its polemical character. The Martin note and the Chavin report were products of a propaganda mill. Those collaborationists like Déat and Constantini who publicized the affair in the press were the technocrats' rivals for power. They had no evidence for their case except for circulars like the Chavin report. The two authors of personal memoirs most responsible for sustaining the legend, Du Moulin de Larbarthète and Nicolle, were the technocrats' enemies. Nicolle based his account on gossip while Du Moulin never fully believed what he wrote, for he later privately retracted most of his accusations about the synarchs.[99] In the past twenty-five years research has failed to uncover one new piece of evidence to substantiate the thesis that the Synarchy was a political plot of the plutocracy. Only the MSE pact was not the work of Vichy polemics, and it seems to have been the product of an inconsequential Masonic sect that had nothing to do with Darlan's team.

No sinister conspiracy existed among Darlan's technocrats in 1941 except in the imagination of a few of their enemies who found it a convenient rumor. Yet even a falsehood can have significance. In this case the Synarchy legend testifies to the factionalism, opportunism, and personal rivalries at Vichy and reveals the strength and nature of antitechnocratic sentiment in wartime France. The technocrats' acquisition of political power in 1941, and their reforms—especially the Organization Committees—generated the legend. In short, the dispute over the Synarchy was an important precedent for the continuing controversy over the progress of technocracy in modern France. Yet the legend was false, and now it is time to lay it to rest.

[99] In a private letter to Barnaud's wife (Jan. 16, 1946) Du Moulin confessed that he had written the chapter on the Synarchy in the spring of 1944 while he himself was accused of being a synarch. Apparently to clear himself he called attention to others. He stressed in this letter that he never believed in the existence of an esoteric secret society bent on seizing power at Vichy, and corrected his earlier view of Darlan's team by saying it was "less homogeneous" than he had imagined, and in the end had rapidly broken up (Barnaud, *Commission d'enquête,* VIII, 2299).